
EPA adds Superfund sites

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed adding three new Superfund sites in Texas to the federal Superfund National Priorities List, according to a joint announcement from EPA and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission.

In this area, EPA is adding Patrick Bayou near Deer Park and the 150-acre Malone Services Co. site in Texas City.

EPA reported that chromium and lead from the Malone site have migrated to Galveston Bay via a shallow ground water aquifer beneath the Malone site.

Galveston Bay is the seventh largest estuary in the United States, with more than 70 species of waterfowl and shorebirds and 90 species of amphibians and reptiles in its 600-square-mile area.

EPA Patrick Bayou's condition was caused by the accumulation of pollutants from permitted industrial waste water discharges, municipal wastewater treatment plant effluent and storm water runoff from industrial facilities along the Houston Ship Channel and nearby urban residential areas.

Engineer Linda Shead, executive director of the Galveston Bay Foundation said concerns with the

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release of chromium and lead at the Malone site are determined by the level of toxicity.

"Basically they are heavy metals which are generally toxic to marine life," Shead said. "In the case of Malone, there are marshy areas around there and on site where wading birds and other species are known to be feeding. It's not so toxic they are falling over dead, but we don't know the concentrations of chromium and lead. Therefore, we don't know the long-term impacts.

"There is concern if there are ducks in the area," she said.

"They could be hunted somewhere else and that would raise human health concerns. EPA has done a preliminary look, and with the designation as a Superfund site, they will be investigating it in more detail to determine how to clean it up."

Shead said the contamination of Patrick Bayou is primarily from historical practices.

"With the advent of the Clean Water Act, we don't discharge those chemicals in the same quantities as in the past," Shead said. "That's not to say there are not still water quality concerns with the current discharges in all or our bayous, including Patrick."

It is already on the state's 303-D list of impaired waterways, Shead said.

The third site in Texas is R&H Oil Co., an abandoned refinery and gasoline blending facility atop the Edwards Aquifer.

Malone was a hazardous waste storage, reclamation and disposal facility from 1964 through 1996, according to EPA.

Acids, caustics, solvents and oily wastes from the site threaten the Galveston Bay estuary, a prime

wildlife habitat that supports a range of commercial and recreational fishing.

The facility received wastes from a variety of industries and used a 5-acre impoundment for waste storage.

The impoundment contains oily solids and contaminated water up to 40 feet deep. An on-site separator also contains residual waste, the EPA report said.

"Adding these sites to the Superfund list makes federal dollars available, allowing EPA and TNRCC to speed their cleanup and meet the agencies' commitment to protect public health and our environment," said Greg Cooke, EPA Region 6 administrator in Dallas.

In Austin, TNRCC chairman Robert J. Huston threw the weight of the state environmental agency behind the cleanup effort.

"The TNRCC stands ready to assist the EPA in addressing problem sites such as these," Huston said. "Continued cooperation between our agencies is essential to clean up all contaminated properties, particularly those located in environmentally sensitive areas of our state."

— With AP files

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